

“The Soul’s Growth is not Like the Body’s Growth:” Teresa of Jesus’ Fourfold Path for Mystical Transformation¹

Preamble

The path of interiority in beholding divine revelation is central to mysticism, particularly in theistic traditions. This article tries to present Teresa of Jesus’ doctrine on mystical transformation which leads towards ecstatic union. To express this path the Spanish Carmelite mystic makes use of various universal metaphors, symbols and similes. Recent studies have shown that Teresa is an interesting case of a mystic who portrays similarities to, if not influence from, Sufi mysticism. To start with, it is well established that Teresa hails from a *converso* family; moreover, scholars, like Américo Castro, identified both Judaic and Islamic connections² in her mysticism due to the insistence on self-consciousness,

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¹ This paper was originally presented as a talk at the “Theological Anthropology in Interreligious Perspective” Conference (7-9 March 2018, Tübingen), organised by the Zentrum für Islamische Theologie and the Evangelisch-Theologische Fakultät at the Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen.

² Américo Castro, *España en su historia: Cristianos, moros y judíos*, Editorial Losada (Buenos Aires: 1948).

On *converso* families see also, Linda Martz, *A Network of Converso Families in Early Modern Toledo: Assimilating a Minority* (USA: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

introspection and didactic characteristics of *morisco* religious discourse.³ Castro argues that until Teresa there was no Spanish Christian literary discourse which displayed these characteristics, apart from the well-known Augustine's *Confessiones*, widely available to Spanish readers, and which affected Teresa in both her introspective mystical experience as well as her confessional and didactic kind of writing. Within this framework López-Baralt goes as far as to show direct influences of Sufism on Teresa's mysticism⁴ while Éric Geoffroy is more cautious in his approach. He points out that "the fact that a doctrinal theme has been loved and expressed in a prior religion or mystical system does not automatically mean that a later one has borrowed it: beyond dogmas and human psycho-spirituality, experience is certainly one."⁵ This is conceivable, notwithstanding the distinctive characteristics of both Christianity and Islam and their underlying essential difference which shapes both their respective exterior religious practices (exoteric) as well as their inner mystical dimension (esoteric), as elucidated by Macnab. Acknowledging that "Spain was for many centuries a nursery of Sufism"⁶ and that Christianity is "pre-eminently the religion of Love,"⁷ Macnab

³ For further deepening of the subject see Xavier Casassas Canals, "Devoción y Sufismo en los Manuscritos Aljamiado-Moriscos," in *Historia del Sufismo en Al-Andalus*, 226–228; *Memoria de los moriscos. Escritos y relatos de una diáspora cultural*, Biblioteca Nacional de España, 2010; Jason Welle, 'Šūfī Adab Transcending Scruples: The Correspondence of Ibn 'Abbad of Ronda,' *Islamochristiana* 39 (2013): 111–127; *Finding Europe: Discourses on Margins, Communities, Images ca. 13th – ca. 18th Centuries*, eds., Antonio Molho, Diogo Ramado Curto, Niki Coniordos (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007).

⁴ See Luce López-Baralt, *The Sufi Trobar clus and Spanish Mysticism: A Shared Symbolism* (Pakistan, Iqbal Academy, 2000); Luce López-Baralt, *Islam in Spanish Literature: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. Andrew Harley (Brill: Leiden, 1992). While the author manages to show striking similarities in the mystical discourses found in Sufi mystics and Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross one cannot categorically conclude that there is direct influence. The images, metaphors and language used in mysticism is of universal nature. Without denying such parallelisms, in the case of Teresa and John, the roots of such imagery and their usage reveal a highly Biblical and Patristic influence. I would rather speak of similarities, convergences, parallelisms and constants.

⁵ Éric Geoffroy, *Sufism and Saint Teresa of Avila: Experiences for Our Time*, Teresa of Avila, an itinerary for our search for meaning. When the mystical experience opens the way to inter-religious dialogue, International Forum I.T.OUCH' 10th October 2015, 1–2: www.itouchalameda.com accessed 09.02.18.

⁶ Angus Macnab, "Sufism in Muslim Spain," in *Sufism: Love and Wisdom*, ed. Jena-Louis Pichon – Roger Gaetani with a forward by Sayyed Hossein Nasr, Perennial Philosophy Series (Bloomington-Indiana: World Wisdom Inc., 2006), 120. See also, Angus Macnab, *Spain Under the Crescent Moon* (Louisville/KY: Fons Vitae, 1999).

⁷ Macnab, *Sufism in Muslim Spain*, 119

concludes that in mysticism “the similarity of the language and conceptions of whoever follows the way of divine Love, whatever the denomination of the lover may be.”⁸ In the case of mystical Christianity and Sufism, one should consider the singular flourishing of the latter within the Spanish and Andalusian context, and this “to such an extent that it is impossible to avoid the conviction that the voices of the Arab Sufis, or their echoes, should have reached the ears of Juan de la Cruz and Saint Teresa.”⁹ Reynold Nicholson also points out the possible Christian mystical or Neoplatonic, Gnostic, Hindu and Greek ideas at the origins of Muslim Sufism.¹⁰ Anyhow, it is nonetheless irrelevant for the scope of our study, to delve into the question of who influenced who, and to what extent! Irrespective of possible mutual influences and inspirations, the scope of the present paper is that of presenting the mystical path as explained by Teresa of Avila, focusing on metaphors, symbols and imagery common also to Sufism.

Surely, Teresa dwells in a liminal space between her origins and Spanish identification, and mystical discourse is highly introspective, symbolical and pointing towards self-knowledge. This is especially true in the use of the seven-mansioned castle, or fortress, and the soul's meandering in it towards spiritual ascension.¹¹ The castle is, however, not the only metaphor she uses in her complex theory of the path towards mystical transforming union. This contribution will try to focus on the doctrine of the soul's progression, from meditation to union, in Teresa's fourfold path for mystical transformation, symbolically expressed as the watering of the soul-garden by four waters, or types of water. Rooted in a specific Christian anthropology in her mystical theory, Teresa shows that while the physical actions described in this process express the inner actions of the heart, nonetheless interior growth is not like physical growth towards spiritual perfection and transformation.

⁸ Ibid., 120.

⁹ Gamal Abdel-Karim, “El Sufismo y el Islam,” *Pensamiento* 64/242 (2008): 941.

¹⁰ Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, *Sufism. The Mysticism of Islam* (Los Angeles: IndoEuropean Publishing, 2009), 11-25.

¹¹ Even here scholars like Swietlicki, hurry to decipher kabbalistic influences See C. Swietlicki, *Spanish Christian Cabala: The Works of Luis de León, Santa Teresa de Jesús and San Juan de la Cruz* (Columbia MO: Missouri Press 1986). Hilary Pearson points out that Swietlicki's arguments are not persuasive, when taking into consideration the cultural context. See Hilary Pearson, *Santa Teresa la conversa: Are There Jewish Influences in the Writings of Teresa of Avila?*, Teresa of Avila 1515-2015: Mystical Theology and Spirituality in the Carmelite Tradition (Twickenham, London: St Mary's University), 18-20 June 2015, 1-17, *pro manuscripto*. (on-line) <https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/research/centres/inspire/teresa-of-avila-1515-2015.aspx>. Accessed 04/05/18.

A Relational Experience

As I have already stated – and I do not wish this to be forgotten, in this life we are living the soul does not grow like the body, even though we say it grows, and it truly does. But once a child has become an adult and has developed a strong body, and is already a man, he does not shrink and become small again. But the Beloved does wish this to happen to the soul. The only way I know this is that have seen it myself. This must be the case so as to humble us for our own greater good and to remind us not to become careless in this state of exile. The higher we ascend, the more closely we must pay attention, and the less we must rely on our own self.¹²

So writes Teresa in the *Book of Her Life* into which she proclaims God's mercy towards her: *misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo*. In this autobiography, Teresa shares with us her experience of an encounter with God through Jesus Christ the Incarnate Word (λόγος)¹³ In Teresa, this encounter leads to ecstatic mystical transforming union of wills. She “believed that all things, most especially her own self, must be subject to the will of God.”¹⁴ Through her interest in the dynamic processes of personal transformation, Teresa presents us with a reflection on “the identity and nature of the human person.”¹⁵ The soul, in her mindset and writings, refers to the human person, and in her mystical doctrine, the fruit of her experience, Teresa builds upon a positive premise: the beauty and dignity of the human person, created in the image and likeness of the Triune God, and the dwelling place of divine presence.¹⁶ Nonetheless, Teresa is also aware of human sinfulness and helplessness.¹⁷

¹² Santa Teresa de Jesus, “Libro de la vida,” XV:12, in *Obras completas. Edición manual*, ed. Efren de la Madre de Dios – Otger Steggink, BAC (Madrid: 2003), 91. Translation from the original mine. While all Teresian quotes are taken from this edition, to facilitate reading, references indicate only the Teresian text and not the edition's page numbering.

¹³ Corresponding to *Aql* in Islam, especially in Sufism.

¹⁴ Adrian J. Reimers, *The Soul of the Person: A Contemporary Philosophical Psychology* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 217.

¹⁵ Christina Llanes, *Early Modern Catholicism: Teresa of Avila and Martin Luther: the Role of Action in the Life of a Christian* (03/16/12), online: https://www.academia.edu/2027634/Teresa_of_Avila_and_Martin_Luther_the_Role_of_Action_in_the_Life_of_a_Christian. Accessed on 03/05/18.

¹⁶ This foundational premise is expounded especially in the Interior Castle. See *St. Teresa of Avila: The Interior Castle. Study Edition*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, ed. Kieran Kavanaugh and Carol Lisi (Washington D.C.: ICS, 2010).

¹⁷ It is difficult to agree however with Antonio-Pérez Romero's conclusion that in Teresa “the human being is characterized as extremely sinful, helpless and miserable before God and His supreme goodness and power” to such an extent that the person is “too weak, too miserable, too wretched to reach God; to do anything to please Him; or to do anything to help themselves

All through her writings Teresa keeps referring to her experience, even in the so called "treatise on the degrees of prayer," where she interrupts the flow of her autobiography, starting from chapter eleven going right through chapter twenty-two. It is in this short treatise that we find her statement: "in this life we are living, the soul does not grow like the body." Here, in chapter fifteen, she reverts back to her experience, assuring readers that "the only way I know this is that I've seen it myself." The short treatise on prayer, an addition to the second redaction of the *Libro de la Vida*, serves a twofold purpose:

- 1) that of a doctrinal introduction "to the narration of her great mystical graces,"¹⁸ to help the reader understand these graces, and
- 2) "an orienting introduction for the neophyte mystic who is the first reader" who is none other than the learned Dominican Padre García de Toledo (1515 – 1590).¹⁹ García was experiencing similar mystical experiences to hers, so she imparts experiential guidance to him. Borrowing Mahid Fakhry's threefold identification of varieties in mysticism, the Teresian experience falls into the visionary and unitary varieties.²⁰

Taking this into consideration enables us to easily capture the reason for a marked insistence on experience. We will not be mistaken to state that we have a case here of double subversion.²¹ Firstly, the book is addressed to a learned theologian, a censor, who nonetheless needs guidance to find his way through

concerning spiritual matters and their salvation": Antonio-Pérez Romero, *Subversion and Liberation in the Writings of St. Teresa of Avila* (Cleveland: John Carroll University, 1996), 56.

¹⁸ Tomás Alvarez, *St. Teresa of Avila. 100 Themes on her Life and Work*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, (Washington DC: ICS, 2011), 281-282.

¹⁹ For a short bionote on García de Toledo see "Teresa de Jesus y la Orden de santo Domingo," in *Teresa de la rueca a la pluma* (on-line): [/https://delaruecaalapluma.wordpress.com/2016/08/08/](https://delaruecaalapluma.wordpress.com/2016/08/08/). Accessed on February 12, 2018.

²⁰ "There are in Islamic mysticism (and presumably in other mysticisms as well) three varieties, which differ either in terms of the object they seek or the mode of approximation towards that object. I will call these three varieties the philosophical, the visionary, and the unitary. The Divine (however it may be conceived) is the object of the second and the third variety, but not of the first. The apprehension or vision of this Divine is the purpose of the second, whereas union or identification with the Divine is the goal of the third; hence the two names I have applied to them. A subordinate entity lying halfway between God and man is the object of the first, and theoretical communication or "conjunction" with the object is its goal." Mahid Fakhry, "Three Varieties of Mysticism in Islam," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* no.2 (1971): 193-207.

²¹ For an indepth study of subversion in St Teresa of Avila see Pérez-Romero, *Subversion and Liberation in the Writings of St Teresa of Avila*, 195-205. See also, Beverly J. Lanzetta, *Radical Wisdom: A Feminist Mystical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 137-154.

his own experience which he cannot grasp or understand. Secondly, guidance comes not from the legitimate hierarchy, or the learned, but from a woman, and more precisely from an unlearned Carmelite cloistered nun. Teresa was “no learned theologian and her writings show direct simplicity and a down to earth un-pretentious humour.”²²

Padre García and Teresa will eventually establish a deep intimate friendship and it is partly thanks to him that Teresa puts into writing her experience. After meeting her in 1562 at the villa of Doña Luisa de la Cerda, in Toledo, Teresa herself ardently prays to the Lord begging him to allow her to include García in their friendship.²³ Padre Pedro Ibáñez, friend of both Teresa and García, relates a witty anecdote of a conversation between Teresa and the Lord Jesus, elucidating the aforementioned subversion. Ibáñez recalls that once, during her prayer (*oración* = loving conversation), Teresa asked the Lord whether “there other persons, like the literate and the learned, who will do much better than wretched me, if you ask them to do that which you are asking of me?” To this question the Lord, “as if he was deeply hurt in his heart, answered her, “Since the literate and the learned do not even desire, nor are they ready to talk with me, needy and discarded by them, I myself come in search of little women with whom I can rest and speak of my things.”²⁴

Teresa, García and Ibáñez are included in this intimate circle of friends of Christ. What brings them together, alongside other friends of Teresa, is friendship with Christ experienced in Teresian mysticism as the binding reason (*λόγος*) between God and humanity as well as between humans themselves. Without making too much of a comparison it is also worth noting here what the Sufi ‘*Īsawī* mystic Muḥyi ’d-Dīn ibn ‘Arabī, who deeply esteemed Jesus Christ, writes, in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya*, on Jesus in bonding terms:

The Seal of universal holiness, above which there is no other holy, is Our Lord Jesus (*Sayyidnā ‘Īsā*). We have met several contemplatives of the Heart of Jesus. ...I myself have been united to him several times in my ecstasies, and by his

²² Dierdre Green, “Living Between the Worlds: Bhakti Poetry and the Carmelite Mystics,” in *The Yogi and the Mystic: Studies in Indian and Comparative Mysticism*, Durham Indological Series – 1, ed. Karel Werner (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1989), 125.

²³ “Señor, no me habéis de negar esta merced: mirad que es bueno este sujeto para nuestro amigo,” *Vida* XXXIV:8.

²⁴ “Informe del P. Pedro Ibáñez sobre el espíritu de S. Teresa,” in *Obras de Santa Teresa*, II: *Relaciones*, Biblioteca Mística Carmelitana ed. Silverio de Santa Teresa (Burgos: El Monte Carmelo, 1915), 149-150.

ministry I returned to God at my conversion. He has given me the name of friend and has prescribed austerity and nakedness of spirit.”²⁵

In Teresa's particular case, friendship with Christ brings together both the learned and the unlearned to sharing their relational experience with Christ who is the path to divine Wisdom. Though Teresa abundantly sought to learn from profuse reading and from seeking the company and counsel of the learned, it is nonetheless the personal encounter with Christ which enlightens her: “I understood,” she says, “that if the Lord did not show me, I was able to learn little from books, because there was nothing I understood until His Majesty gave me understanding through experience.”²⁶ Theory, as “the doctrine of books or of the discourse of learned men or the thought that she herself came up with,” confirmed Teresa in her experiential knowledge, namely “to know something for having lived, felt, or gone through it... either empirically with the senses or in one's own life...even the experience of profound friendship or the highest experience of the mystery of God.”²⁷

Experience for Teresa emerges from the relational dimension of her human life: self-knowledge, family, Church, religious community, friends and society. It is precisely this relational dimension which constitutes the key for understanding Teresa's mysticism. The relational dimension, expressed in her Spousal Mysticism, thrusts the soul into the “demanding: generous, self-spending, and exhausting service. Teresa even uses the word ‘laborious.’” Bielecki points out that “The proper relationship between these two consequences is clear in the teachings of Jesus. First, he says, ‘love the Lord your God with all your mind and heart and soul and body.’ *Espousal*. Second, ‘love your neighbour as yourself.’ *Service*.”²⁸

Hence, in Teresa's doctrine, “human relationships are the guarantee of authenticity in the teaching... They are the measure of one's progress and the true test of the love of God.”²⁹

²⁵ As quoted in: Macnab, *Sufism in Muslim Spain*, 120. Sufi saints “inherit their sanctity from a particular prophet through the intermediary of the Prophet of Islam”: Zachary Markwith, “Jesus and Christic Sanctity in Ibn ‘Arabi and Early Islamic Spirituality,” *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society* 57 (2015): 89.

²⁶ *Vida*, XXII:3. Similar expressions are to be found in all of her her writings, like: *Libro de la vida*, IV:10, XIV:8, XVIII:8, XXII:6, XXVI:5, XL: 20; *Camino de Perfeccion*, Prol. 3, XXIII:4, 6, XXVIII:1; *Las Moradas* VI, 9.4.

²⁷ Alvarez, *St. Teresa of Avila*, 216-217.

²⁸ Tessa Bielecki, *Holy Daring. Conversations with St Teresa, the Wild Woman of Avila* (Boulder: Albion-Andalus Inc., 2015), 71-72.

²⁹ Larkin, “Human Relationships in St Teresa of Avila,” 135-136.

Unitive Mysticism

Teresa teaches us that the *terminus* of mystical experience is the “complete transformation of the soul in God.”³⁰ It is this transformation which is the source of inner peace and harmony. In the *Libro de la Vida*, Teresa cites Jesus’ words “Go in peace” to an anxious Mary of Magdala (the disgraced) or, in Teresa’s mind, Mary of Bethany (the friend and disciple), the archetype of transformation:

Let us, then, pray to Him always to show His mercy upon us, with a submissive spirit, yet trusting in the goodness of God. And now that the soul is permitted to sit at the feet of Christ, let it contrive not to quit its place, but keep it anyhow. Let it follow the example of the Magdalene; and when it shall be strong enough, God will lead it into the wilderness.³¹

To explain herself as best as she could, Teresa deals a lot with mystical transformation through the use of symbols and metaphors. She insists on self-knowledge, not only as the starting point of our spiritual life, but our companion. Well known is the image of the Interior Castle, or the Inner Mansions, equivalent to the *sefirot* in Kabbalah, the *maqâms* in Sufism, the Hindu *koshas*, the *skandhas* in Buddhism and the tantric *chakras*.³² Another metaphor is that of the earthbound cocooned ‘dead’ silkworm emerging as a beautiful and lofty butterfly. Common to both these images is the notion of a movement towards our inner dimension, towards the centre, there where I discover myself to be potentially another, there where I discover my real self. Self-knowledge in Teresa however is never solely about absorption. Self-knowledge comes mainly through relationships. Even in its journey towards the centre, the soul discovers herself bride of the Bridegroom, and the ugly silkworm discovers itself to be a beautiful butterfly only after passing, in the prayer of union through the cocoon who is Christ.³³ The support and help of others is also necessary:

When the warm weather comes, and the mulberry-trees begin to show leaf, this seed starts to take life; until it has this sustenance, on which it feeds, it is as dead. The silkworms feed on the mulberry-leaves until they are fully grown, *when people put down twigs, upon* which, with their tiny mouths, they start spinning silk, making themselves very tight little cocoons, in which they bury themselves.

³⁰ *Vida*, XX:18.

³¹ *Vida*, XXII:19.

³² See Johannes Schiettecatte, *Teresa and the East: The Human Thirsting for the Absolute*, Teresa of Avila, an itinerary for our search for meaning. When the mystical experience opens the way to inter-religious dialogue, International Forum I.T.OUCH’ 10th October 2015, 1-11: www.itouchalameda.com. Accessed 09.02.18.

³³ *Las Moradas* V, 2.

Then, finally, the worm, which was large and ugly, comes right out of the cocoon a beautiful white butterfly.

When I say He will be our Mansion, and we can construct it for ourselves and hide ourselves in it, I seem to be suggesting that we can subtract from God, or add to Him. But, of course, we cannot possibly do that! We can neither subtract from, and add to, God, but we can subtract from, and add to, ourselves, just as these little silkworms do. And, before we have finished doing all that we can in that respect, *God will take this tiny achievement of ours*, which is nothing at all, unite it with His greatness, and give it such worth that its reward will be the Lord Himself.

Perhaps the relational dimension comes out clearly in the parable used by Teresa to explain transformation in the four ways of gardening (*Vida* 10-22). Teresa describes the process of transformation as the work of love, and effort of love. She does so by comparing the soul to a garden. Alvarez notes that a comparison in the Teresian lexicon is “equivalent to a simile, image, allegory, or symbol. In fact, she will find support initially in an elemental simile; then she will go on enriching it and converting it into a real symbol.”³⁴

The garden is a major symbol in world religions. Inherited from Persia it is common also to various mystical traditions, like Sufism, wherein it stands as “the earthly reflection of Paradise.”³⁵ Teresa tells us that in tending and watering the garden the soul becomes “servant of love” while ascending to “behold perfect love or charity.”³⁶

As in the previous metaphors and symbols, the ascetical effort constitutes a journey from our ego towards divine Love which requires the abandonment of our false self through a “progressive interiorization, con-centration and deepening.” In this journey “we go beyond ourselves by learning to recognise the divine Presence as within at every level and aspect of our person.”³⁷

So, in the parable of the four waters, Teresa plays with images of waters flowing into the garden from the outside and waters irrigating the garden from the deep. The garden evokes the Earthly Paradise, Eden, wherein God strolls in the company of Adam, and, similar to what we find in Sufism, water flowing into

³⁴ Alvarez, *St. Teresa of Avila*, 281.

³⁵ Sayyed Hossein Nasr, *The Garden of Truth. The Vision and Promise of Sufism, Islam's Mystical Tradition* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), xv; Shirvani, Hamid. “The Philosophy of Persian Garden Design: The Sufi Tradition,” *Landscape Journal* 4, no. 1 (1985): 23-30.

³⁶ *Vida*, XI:1.

³⁷ Schiettecatte, *Teresa and the East*, 10-11.

the garden symbolises God's mercy.³⁸ While Teresa was surely imbibed by the "pervasive Islamic culture in Avila"³⁹ there is no real evidence that Teresa has in mind the Islamic garden in her garden imagery.

Though the garden is a metaphor of the soul, Teresa tells us that both Christ and the soul are gardeners. A particular characteristic of Teresa's garden is constant dynamism and movement going on into the garden space. This is also the case when it is unkept.

This point is highly significant as it differs from other usages of the garden symbol in other traditions. In Zen Buddhism for example, stillness and empty space are the main characteristics of the garden, conducive to meditation,⁴⁰ aiming at enabling the practitioner to have an enlightened experience of the Oneness of the Universe. Here, "the garden is something to be seen, and not a place to exercise or relax in"⁴¹ whereas the Teresian garden is a place of encounter between the bride and the divine Bridegroom, where work and leisure take place. It is significant that Teresa uses *huerto/a* and *vergel* when speaking of the soul in garden terms discarding *jardin* and *pensil* with their underlying meaning of pleasure garden.⁴² The underlying biblical paradigm is that of the Song of Songs, wherein the Beloved extols his lover: "you are a garden enclosed, my sister, my lover." Another underlying biblical scene is that of the encounter between the risen Christ and Mary of Magdala on Easter Sunday. In the Teresian garden mystical transformation is clearly the result of an encounter with Christ. It is monotheistically unitive wherein two opposites become one while at the same time keep their distinctiveness.⁴³

³⁸ Sayyed Hossein Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 47.

³⁹ Maryrica Ortiz Lottman, "The Gardens of Teresa of Avila," in *A New Companion to Hispanic Mysticism*, ed. Hilaire Kallendorf (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2010), 328.

⁴⁰ Camelia Nakagawara, "The Japanese Garden for the Mind: The 'Bliss' of Paradise Transcended," *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs* 4, no. 2 (2014): 83-102.

⁴¹ Ueda Atsushi, *Nihonjin to Sumai: The Inner Harmony of the Japanese House* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1990), 161. Similarly, in the Theravada Buddhist texts, the garden is also a place of exercise and work. For an indepth study, see: Millet, Gil Daniel, *The Path and the Castle. A Comparative Study of The Path of Purification of Buddhaghosa and The Interior Castle of Saint Teresa of Ávila: An Analytical Study on their Similarities in the Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (Hong Kong SAR: University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam, 2019).

⁴² Ortiz Lottman, *The Gardens of Teresa of Avila*, 330.

⁴³ Bernardette Roberts, *Nonduality as a Definition of Christ*, Sand Conference: Science and Nonduality – 22 October 2015, San Jose, California. *Pro manuscripto*.

Creative Mysticism⁴⁴

It is an unkept garden with hardened soil. In *Las Moradas*, she observes, lamenting, as Cousins words it, that “we pay too little attention to our souls” because all our attention “is centred... in these bodies of ours.”⁴⁵ This is the first obstacle for mystical transformation: a hardened heart. In the autobiography Teresa confesses that in the first years of her religious life, her heart was hardened. She says that she was numb, dead (*Vida* 3:1). Dryness and paralysis took hold of her (*Vida* 4:9). Healing came only through the intercession of St Joseph the contemplative who, I suspect, for Teresa serves a role similar to that of Al-Khidr, in Islam.⁴⁶

She continues to say that the garden, at this stage, was in need of watering in all possible ways: through spring water, rainfall, dewfall and vapor. The four waters irrigating the garden may parallel with “the four intersecting water channels in the Islamic garden.”⁴⁷ Water indicates liquefaction in the spiritual life. We find this metaphor constantly in mystical writings and in the experience of mystics. Origen the Christian (184-253), for example, speaks of the fall of rational beings from a process of solidification, where one becomes heavier and therefore falls away from God. In eschatology, according to Origen, the children of God will return to the original, lighter, state of a spiritual body.

I am of the opinion that as the end and the consummation of the saints will be in those worlds that are not seen and eternal, it must be supposed, from a contemplation of that very end, as we have frequently pointed out above, that rational creatures have also had a similar beginning. And if they had a beginning such as the end for which they hope, they were undoubtedly from the beginning in those worlds that are not seen and eternal. And if this is so, then there has been a descent from the higher conditions to the lower, not only on the part of those souls who have by the variety of their own movements deserved it, but also on

⁴⁴ Ruth Meredith, *Creativity, Spiritual Transformation and the Image of the Butterfly in the Interior Castle of Saint Teresa of Jesus*, pro manuscripto.

⁴⁵ Lance S. Cousins, “The Stages of Christian Mysticism and Buddhist Purification: Interior Castle of St Teresa of Avila and the Path of Purification of Buddhaghosa,” in *The Yogi and the Mystic: Studies in Indian and Comparative Mysticism*, Durham Indological Series – 1, ed. Karel Werner (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1989), 103.

⁴⁶ This point deserves a study on its own. Like Al-Khidr in Sufism, St Joseph in Teresa's experience, is God's special servant, a protector, somewhat of a trickster. In the Matthean Infancy narratives, he seems to act wrongly by not following the Law and keep Mary as his bride, but his decision is steeped in wisdom and benevolence. In the Apocrypha, his staff is evergreen and budding. Moreover, for Teresa he is the discreet initiator to the mystical life. Teresa speaks highly of her devotion to Saint Joseph in chapter six of her Life.

⁴⁷ Ortiz Lottman, *The Gardens of Teresa of Avila*, 330.

that of those who, to serve the whole world, were brought down from the higher and invisible conditions to these lower and visible ones, even against their will. Because the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but by the one who subjected it in hope, so that both the sun and the moon and the stars and the angels of God might fulfil an obedient service for the world; and for those souls which, because of their excessive spiritual defects, needed these denser and more solid bodies, and because of those for whom this was necessary, this visible world was founded. From this, therefore, a descent of everyone alike would seem to be indicated by the meaning of the word, that is, of *καταβολή*. The whole creation indeed entertains the hope of freedom, of being set free from the bondage of corruption when the children of God, who either fell away or were scattered abroad, shall be gathered together into one, or when they shall have fulfilled their other duties in this world, which are known to God alone, the Artificer of all things.⁴⁸

Origen observes that even on the natural level “the seminal moisture is changed into solid flesh and bones. All these instances go to prove that bodily substance is capable of change and can pass from a given quality into another.”⁴⁹ The “spirit is of an opposite nature to this dense and solid body.”⁵⁰ God is spirit (Jn 4:24), hence our return to God is a return to the original state into which we were created. Similarly, in Teresa’s mind *liquid* (water) is the opposite of *solid*, denoting a contrasting state to that of a hardened heart. The water she is pointing to is that of tears. It is the gift of tears (*compunctio cordis*), a sign of repentance (*penthos*), that softens the heart.⁵¹

While perhaps Teresa is indirectly influenced by Origen, she surely relies on the classical fourteenth century Carmelite manual *Decem libri de Institutione Primorum Monachorum*, on the path of monastic perfection in love. For many centuries the first seven books of this text were mythically considered as the Carmelite *Regula Primitiva*, pre-dating the Albertine text. The *Decem libri* inspired her dream of reforming the Order in her quest to return to the original form of life of the hermits of Mount Carmel. The first step in the way to monastic perfection as found in the *Decem libri* is that of dwelling near the brook of Carith to drink of its torrents. Sitting near the brook of Carith, to embark on the journey towards perfection, is the *monachos*, a weeping solitary, shedding tears of compunction for his sins and the sins of the world.

⁴⁸ Origen, *On the First Principles*, III/5.4, trans. G.W.Butterworth, with a foreword by C. Cavadini (Notre Dame/IN: Ave Maria Press, 2013), 314-315.

⁴⁹ Ibid., IV/4.6, 426.

⁵⁰ Ibid., I/1.2, 10.

⁵¹ *Vida* 11:9.

In the journey within both God and the soul labour. The 'four ways of watering the garden' distinguish two divine and two human ways of watering. The two sets correspond to particular states in the life of prayer: ascetical and mystical. In practical terms these two phases and states overlap and should not be strictly categorised and strictly human or strictly divine phases. Here God and the person are harmoniously and 'laboriously' active and passive. The two phases indicate an emphasis on either side.

The following are the four ways of watering the garden:

A: *Human ways of watering (ascetical phase)*

1. Starting to care for a barren garden and with hardened soil to work on (cfr.: Gen. 3: 17-19). At this stage we need to pull up water through meditation and spiritual reading. We gain little produce as we are still in the stage of strengthening the will.
2. God comes to our help, symbolised by the watermill. We get enough water to keep plants alive and relatively moist. At this stage we start growing in quiet prayer and recollection. We also start tasting divine love, which in turn enkindles love in our heart.

B: *Divine ways of watering (mystical phase)*

3. As we progress, the life of grace starts having effect in us. Streams of living water start irrigating our garden. The will and understanding are strengthened and the intellect, together with memory, become active. Teresa compares our will and understanding with Mary of Bethany, focused on Jesus and his words, sitting at his feet. Memory and intellect are symbolised by Martha, Mary's sister, who actively serves Jesus in her own house. Teresa brings together here, in line with the original cohesion in Christian mysticism, action (effort) and contemplation. Martha and Mary are both focused on Jesus, detached from everything else. Teresa holds that at this stage we start moving to integrity from fragmentation (*Vida* 17:4): We in God (Mary) and God in us (Martha). Imagination and memory can distract us from our attention to Jesus, through what we call today in psychology 'destructive thoughts'. The Fathers of the Desert, like Evagrius, called these *logismoi*. We need therefore to undergo a purification of the memory, not to get stuck in the past (negative or positive). Quiet prayer and recollection (*oración* in Teresian terms and understanding), or what we refer to today as Meditation, Mindfulness, Centering prayer, Loving Kindness Meditation, and other, thrusts us into the purification of memory which in turn gifts us with freedom of spirit. Meditation techniques today

are researched in psychotherapeutic contexts.⁵² Studies have shown that meditation exercises enhances “unconditional, positive emotional states of kindness and compassion” and may be used “for targeting a variety of different psychological problems that involve interpersonal processes, such as depression, social anxiety, marital conflict, anger, and coping with the strains of long-term caregiving.”⁵³ At this stage we are freer to give ourselves to the consequential demands of our life of prayer in self-oblation as participation in the *kenosis* of Christ.

4. For the final stage of watering Teresa brings forth the image of rainfall. Here God totally takes over to “water” our soul with his loving and merciful grace. We become totally receptive, actively passive, ready and willing to receive God’s grace. At this stage Teresa speaks of ecstatic mystical union and the soul’s elevation in God (*Vida* 20). Mystical transforming union is not a sentiment. Primarily and exclusively it refers to a union of wills. We are elevated in God like vapour emanating from moist soil. Teresa explains:

The Lord gathers up the soul, just (we might say) as the clouds gather up the vapours from the earth, and raises it up till it is right out of itself (I have heard that it is in this way that the clouds or the sun gather up the vapours and the cloud rises to Heaven and takes the soul with it, and begins to reveal to it things concerning the Kingdom that He has prepared for it.⁵⁴

To the water symbol, Teresa adds fire, symbol of anxious love. Both symbols give the notion of lightness. In this context Teresa mentions a nun “full of Divine love” saying that she saw her taking flight from earth to heaven. The same is said of Friar Didachus of St. Mathias, who was enflamed with divine love.

⁵² R. Walsh and S.L. Shapiro, “The Meeting of Meditative Disciplines and Western Psychology: A Mutually Enriching Dialogue,” *American Psychologist*, 61/3 (2006): 227-239.

⁵³ Stefan G. Hofman, Paul Grossman, Devon E. Hinton, “Loving-Kindness and Compassion Meditation: Potential for Psychological Interventions,” *Clinical Psychology Review* no. 31(2011): 1126-1132.

⁵⁴ *Vida*, XX:1-2.

“The soul doesn’t grow like the body”: Mysticism of Diminishment

In Teresa’s human and mystical experience, although the soul’s growth follows different dynamics from those at play in physical growth, both are intimately bound together.⁵⁵ To those who take Jesus as their friend, Teresa says that he, “sustains their bodily life with greater health and give life to their souls.”⁵⁶ There are many instances in Teresa’s writings where physical health is a sign of spiritual health and where sickness is related to sinfulness and spiritual malaise.

Nonetheless, Teresa also shows us that the soul grows and matures when the body is ailing. She shares with the reader her own experience, saying: “though I bore my sickness with great joy, I none the less desired to be well again. I often reflected that, if I were to grow well and then to incur damnation, it would be better for me to remain as I was.”⁵⁷ On the contrary, when one is overly (and perhaps obsessively) attached to one’s own physical wellbeing, the soul craves for life: “seeing how tied I was to my body, yet how, on the other hand, my spirit craved time for itself, I became so depressed that I started to shed floods of tears and to be in great distress.”⁵⁸

A person who is elevated to ecstatic mystical union, who is in the fourth way of watering the garden, through constant rainfall divinely sent “from Heaven to fill and saturate the whole of this garden with an abundance of water,” experiences simultaneously growth and expansion in the soul, as well as unharmed physical and mental loss of strength:

While seeking God in this way, the soul becomes conscious that it is fainting almost completely away, in a kind of swoon with an exceeding great and sweet delight. It gradually ceases to breathe and all its bodily strength begins to fail it: it cannot even move its hands without great pain; its eyes involuntarily close, or, if they remain open, they can hardly see. If a person in this state attempts to read, he is unable to spell out a single letter: it is as much as he can do to recognize one. He sees that letters are there, but, as the understanding gives him no help, he cannot read them even if he so wishes. He can hear, but he cannot understand what he hears. He can apprehend nothing with the senses, which only hinder his soul’s joy and thus harm rather than help him. It is futile for him to attempt to speak: his mind cannot manage to form a single word, nor, if it could, would he have the strength to pronounce it. For in this condition all outward strength vanishes,

⁵⁵ Britta Souvignier, *La dignidad del cuerpo. Salvación y sanación en Teresa de Jesús*, trans. Paloma Sánchez de Munaín (Madrid: EDE, 2008), 341.

⁵⁶ *Vida*, XXIII:6.

⁵⁷ *Vida*, VI:5.

⁵⁸ *Vida*, XL.

while the strength of the soul increases so that it may the better have fruition of its bliss. The outward joy experienced is great and most clearly recognised.

This prayer, for however long it may last, does no harm; at least, it has never done any to me, nor do I ever remember feeling any ill effects after the Lord has granted me this favour, however unwell I may have been: indeed, I am generally much the better for it. What harm can possibly be done by so great a blessing? The outward effects are so noteworthy that there can be no doubt some great thing has taken place: we experience a loss of strength but the experience is one of such delight that afterwards our strength grows greater.⁵⁹

Again, the relational element is foundational as Teresa develops her thought in the context of seeking God. Moreover, Jesus Christ, through his Sacred Humanity, heals the person in body, mind and spirit. Any talk on the soul's growth and on physical or mental growth in Teresa has to be done in reference to the person of Jesus Christ, fully human, fully divine. The person experiences spiritual growth when freed from the disordered attachment to physicality, while consciously living realistically in practice within down to earth attitude. Discipline and self-restraint in the spirit of a healthy *contemptus mundi*, imitating Christ's lifestyle who dwelt amongst us in his sacred humanity enabling integrative growth. Physicality participates in the *kenosis* of Christ; our inner being, the soul, grows, matures and is elevated to union with God. While the body diminishes, the soul grows and matures. Again, the soul grows through participation in the self-oblation of Christ giving himself for "our sake and salvation." Self-oblation is expressed in making of ourselves a gift for the good of others in the smaller and larger community to whom we are related. Hence the soul grows through a mysticism of diminishment, that is, simultaneously growing as it diminishes. Whereas the body either grows or diminishes.

The soul's growth therefore necessitates a healthy dose of detachment, renunciation and mortification to "embrace the Creator alone," caring nothing for our own pleasure, self-will, in order to surrender completely to God's will in humility out of love. Detachment and mortification, especially from one's own will, is attainable also through an abiding in Jesus' command to love one another as he has loved us. "Growth toward God without an active concern for social justice and the flourishing of each member of the human family is a *non*

⁵⁹ *Vida*, XVII:10-11.

sequitur in Teresa's holistic theology."⁶⁰ God's works are the sign of a healthy authentic spiritual growth of the soul in mystical union (marriage).⁶¹ Ernest Larkin comments that in Teresa's mysticism "the best test for the conformity of wills is the prosaic one of fraternal charity; horizontal relationships are credible indicators of the vertical relationship with God."⁶² In this, Teresa proves to be very radical. She insists that "we cannot know whether or not we love God, although there are strong indications for recognizing that we do love Him; but we can know whether we love our neighbor."⁶³

Love for neighbour, detachment and humility are the preferred ways taught to us by Christ's example in the mystery of his *kenósis*. It is in this way that virtues are infused in us by God's grace. Thus, the soul, in contrast with the body, grows through diminishment. In this, Teresa is close to Eckhart's mysticism. Similar notions are found also in more recent mystics like Simone Weil.⁶⁴ Teresa gives a particular feminine, delicate touch to the understanding of the mystery of the *kenósis* as it unfolds in the gospels. She frequently mentions in some way or another the needy Christ, be it by the well thirsting, or in the Garden of Olives pleading with the disciples to stay with him in his agony. It is Jesus' vulnerability which drew Teresa to a deep reciprocal friendship with Christ who, she says "being alone and afflicted, as a person in need, he had to accept me."⁶⁵ Teresa sees Christ as being in continual transformation: Divine becoming human, King (His Majesty) but undergoing suffering and brokenness, etc... These transformations bring transformation in her soul. Cynthia Robinson points out that this conception of the Teresian Christ parallels with the Sufi concept of an ever-changing mental image of God.⁶⁶ Befriending Christ in his vulnerability and diminishment Teresa discovers he is a faithful friend in our own vulnerability and fear. In turn, this mutuality opens the soul to a "responsiveness to suffering, like Christ's own."⁶⁷ Most important is that "the Beloved does wish this (diminishment) to happen to the soul."

⁶⁰ Gillian T.W. Ahlgren, "Wise Action in a World of Suffering and Injustice," in *Teresa of Avila: Mystical Theology and Spirituality in the Carmelite Tradition*, eds. Peter Tyler and Edward Howells (New York: Routledge, 2017), 113.

⁶¹ See *Las Moradas* 7: 4,6.

⁶² Larkin, "Human Relationships in St Teresa of Avila," 136.

⁶³ *Las Moradas* 5: 3, 8.

⁶⁴ James Kellenberger, *Dying to Self and Detachment* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 41-42.

⁶⁵ *Vida*, 9:4.

⁶⁶ See Cynthia Robinson, *Imagining the Passion in a Multiconfessional Castile* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 2013).

⁶⁷ Ahlgren, "Wise Action in a World of Suffering and Injustice," 114.

Finally, Teresa's understanding of the soul's growth is based on the belief in the dignity of the human person. Frequently Teresa insists that the soul should, on her part, aspire to do everything in her capability to co-operate with God for her own growth to the state of transforming mystical union. With the grace of God, "it is in our hand, if we will."⁶⁸

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⁶⁸ *Las Moradas* 5: 3,7. For advocating human dignity and merit, Teresa was accused by a handful of scholars as semi-pelagian. See Boyle, *Divine Domesticity: Augustine of Thagaste to Teresa of Avila*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought - 74 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 227-255; Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, *Senses of Touch: Human Dignity and Deformity from Michelangelo to Calvin* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 210-212.